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PREPARATORY GREEK IN THE UNIVERSITY

It is a matter of no little significance to those interested in and observant of the progress of classical instruction in the United States, that Harvard, in recently readjusting her entrance requirements, in response to more modern social and educational conditions, has not only made some modifications of its protective attitude toward Greek, but, as a sort of compensation, has made provision for instruction in preparatory Greek in the university. It has been possible for some years past to enter Harvard without knowing the Greek alphabet or reading of the "Wrath of Achilles, the son of Peleus." But entrance by any other route was made so difficult and so tortuous that only one pupil in twenty chose it. But by the new definitions, Greek, once the petted and pampered child of all the educational tradition and culture of the ages, has come to be only one of a numerous progeny of educational children to take her place on an equal footing with the rest. No special favors are to be shown her, no partiality manifested. She must stand or fall on her own merits as an educational instrument. The substitute for Greek in the entrance requirements as newly defined, is no more rigorous, either as to time or method, than Greek itself. In the western universities, of course, Greek has long since been taken out of swaddling clothes and forced to fight the battle for existence on equal terms with her rapidly growing brothers and sisters; and no loss in prestige or diminution in popularity has seemingly thereby accrued. Statistics show that, while the rate of increase in the total enrollment of pupils in secondary schools in the United States from 1889-90 to 1897-8 was 86 per cent., the rate of increase in Greek was 94 per cent. The total enrollment of pupils in Greek in 1889-90 was 12,869; in 1897-8, 24,994. This certainly affords no comfort to those who think Greek is tottering, a feeble and feckless giant, to its grave. And it shows, too, that the charm of old Greek, the language of Homer and Hesiod and Plato and Paul, the choicest instrument of culture in our educational curriculum, needs no hothouse methods to insure life and vitality, but by its own inherent worth will ever appeal to a large and constantly increasing number of cultured minds. And so we believe that the step taken by Harvard in practically ousting Greek from its

privileged position will in nowise work to its hurt, but will now and ultimately tend to its healthier and saner growth. "Let every tub," said the old schoolmaster to the boy who was giving whispered assistance to his needy neighbor, "let every tub stand upon its own bottom." So, let the Greek tub stand on its own bottom along with the physics tub and the history tub and every other tub that floats on the educational pond.

But what of the move to offer instruction in preparatory Greek in the university? Has that any sinister significance for the future of Greek? Does it mean that the day is dawning when Greek will be relegated entirely to the college and university and be placed in the same category with Sanskrit and Hebrew? These are interesting queries to which time alone will give an adequate and absolutely correct answer, yet looking at the step in its genesis, it may hardly be interpreted, we think, to involve the implication suggested in the question. Nay, rather we believe the move will serve to strengthen the position of Greek and give it a more tenacious hold and a longer lease of life than it might otherwise enjoy.

In the first place it will open the privileges of Greek to many who are now barred from it by reason of its restriction to the secondary school. In almost all our colleges and universities are to be found students who have come from schools where Greek is not taught. Many of these would welcome the opportunity to begin the study of Greek were courses offered in the university. Many a man has felt regret that nowhere along the line of his educational career did Greek appear and has stated that had the opportunity been open to him in college he would surely have undertaken the study. It may be asked why he did not study it in the high or preparatory school which happened to be located in the same town with the college. In infrequent cases this is done, but there are numerous reasons why such a solution cannot satisfy the problem and why it cannot meet with any general favor or acceptance. On the one hand, it entails additional expense in the way of tuition and fees. While this would be an insignificant and unappreciable factor with some, it might not be so insignificant with others. In fact it might be the one deterring element. Again, it would have to be taken as an extra study for which no credit could be given toward a college degree; and most students have so much to do to secure the regularly prescribed credits for graduation that little time is left for extra and uncredited work. In the third place there is the restraining feeling against going back to

the high-school atmosphere after having once left it. College students dislike to take high-school studies. They feel — whether rightly or wrongly we will not say — that there is something of a loss of prestige or dignity in so doing, and only under stress of some compelling reason can they be induced to do it. But chiefly and essentially the point of view of the student who begins Greek in his college course is different from that in the secondary school and consequently the method of instruction should be different. For those who, as college students, would wish to study the ancient classic, the object would be not so much to gain a minute philological acquaintance — covering many years of patient, unremitting study — as to obtain a rapid survey of the essential elements and principles of the language and some acquaintance with a few of the epoch-making Greek writers. The object would be literary rather than philological; practical rather than minutely scholastic. To this end the preliminary work would be done with much more speed than is possible or advisable in the preparatory school. The essentials only of the grammar would be taught. The acquirement of a vocabulary and the ability to read would be the objects most constantly kept in view. A general survey of Greek literature with selections from some of the great creative writers would be an essential part of the course. Some such course — here only roughly and rudely outlined — would, we believe, appeal not only to many who had not the opportunity to study Greek in their high-school days, but would appeal also to many who, while having the opportunity, did not avail themselves of it at the earlier stage. For there are many who do not appreciate its worth and importance until they have completed their secondary education and it is only as their mental horizon broadens that they see the desirability and necessity of some first-hand acquaintance with the Greek language and literature. Unless some such way is opened up to them as is proposed by Harvard, they must either altogether deny themselves the desired knowledge, or acquire it at a needless expenditure of time and energy and with results that are not only incommensurate with the amount of time consumed, but, what is worse, with results that fall far short of accomplishing the purpose for which the work was undertaken.

With beginners' courses in the university, of such a nature as has been roughly outlined above, the demands of those students who desire a merely rudimentary and introductory knowledge of the language, would be satisfied, and not only those who had failed to appreciate the value of Greek earlier in their course but also those who had had no

opportunity to study it previously, would be able to atone in the one case for their error, or in the other for their misfortune, as the fact might be.

Instead, therefore, of lessening the prestige or weakening the position, or narrowing the influence of Greek, we believe such a move will rather have a tendency to increase its prestige, strengthen its position, and broaden its influence. In opening its treasure-house anew to studious minds it will not only give but receive good. For to know Greek is to love it and to love it is to recommend it to others, and to recommend it to others is to extend its influence and increase the number of its adherents. So, in ever-widening circles the cause of Greek will go on and the number of those studying it increase.

As to the point that the study of beginning Greek in the college may ultimately lead to its entire transference to the higher institution and its relegation to the category of Sanskrit and Hebrew, we feel that little need be feared. Greek has too vital and intimate connection with modern thought and life to suffer that fate. It has been the source and inspiration of too much that is permanent and eternal in philosophy and literature to become food only for the philologist and the savant. There is no comparison between it and Sanskrit or Hebrew; its whole setting as well as its relations are fundamentally and vitally different, and it would seem hardly possible that the time could come when Greek would appeal to so limited a constituency as either Hebrew or Sanskrit. To place the rudiments of it in the college as well as the secondary school is not to foreshadow its eclipse but to cause it to shine forth with doubled brilliancy.

So we may venture the hope that other universities and colleges will follow the example of Harvard and offer instruction in beginning Greek as well as in beginning German or beginning French. For there is as much reason why the one should be taught as the other. Indeed, as a somewhat more remote and more difficult study, we are not sure but there is more reason.

From every consideration, then, of expediency, of convenience, of educational life and progress, from the point of view equally of the college and the secondary school, and from the interests of the individual student, the offering of courses in preparatory Greek in the higher institutions of learning in our country would seem to be advisable and desirable, and we predict that the coming decade will see a large number of our colleges and universities imitating the example of Harvard.

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